

# OPINIONS

## EDITORIAL

### *Time to grow up*

IN a letter to the Hon. Robert Runciman, Ontario Minister of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services, Herman Stewart, the new president of the Jamaican Canadian Association addressed the issue of young black men who have been shot by Toronto police in the past six months.

The death of 16-year-old Faraz Suleman from a police bullet to the head last week brings the total to four young black men who have been shot by the police since January. Three of them were Jamaicans - Tommy Barnett, Andrew Bramwell and Wayne Williams. Of the four, only one had a gun in his possession at the time of the shooting.

These incidents have increased the cry for closer scrutiny of the use of force by police officers, how the mentally ill are dealt with at the hands of police and, finally, but perhaps most importantly, finding alternative non-lethal weaponry that the police can use to disarm and disable in situations where no human life is in danger.

When Wayne Williams was found smashing windshields of cars parked along a city street, of the five officers who confronted him surely at least one must have become aware that something was not quite right; that the scene playing itself out in front of them was not of a stable individual who was bent on destroying property or doing harm to others? Why then was it necessary to shoot him?

In all our accusations and blame-laying, it would also be wrong of us to assume that the police themselves are not concerned. It is at times like this when tempers are hot and feelings of frustration and despair are at most evident that calm, rational thinking is beneficial. Accusing an entire police force made up of over 7,000 members as being racist is both illogical and irresponsible. In every large community there are those who have built-in biases. A police force the size of Metro Toronto's is no exception. But we must keep things in perspective. Recognition that those individuals do exist, both in the police and in our own community is the first step to climbing over those hurdles and getting on with the job of finding solutions. Let us not have unrest between the police and the black community develop the way it did in the Rodney King incident in Los Angeles and the subsequent riots. The signs are there; to prevent them from spiralling out of control, more dialogue is needed.

And although it seems as if the same issues, recommendations and concerns are being raised time and time again, we must persevere. To stop, would be to give up hope. Groups like the Black Community-Police Consultative Committee have been meeting on an ongoing basis to discuss ways to improve relations between police and the black community. We can only hope and pray the administration and leadership of the police have the same goals in mind when they sit down at the table.

## COMMENTARY

### Diplomatic life

By Colin Rickards

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